

Spirit of the Wedge-tailed Eagle The Art of Humphrey Price-Jones

Paintings and drawings by Humphrey Price-Jones; text by Penny Olsen

Publisher: CSIRO Publishing, 2007. 90 pages, hardcover; ISBN 9780643094338,
265 × 355 mm. RRP \$50.00

This large-format, beautifully produced book consists of a collection of paintings and pencil drawings of eagles, accompanied by pertinent quotations from scientific literature. As indicated by the title, the focus is mainly on Australia's largest true eagle, the Wedge-tailed Eagle.

The artist, Welshman Humphrey Price-Jones, has studied and painted Wedge-tailed Eagles ever since he came to Australia forty years ago. He produces life-size portraits of live birds and the original artworks are up to 1800 mm × 1200 mm. Any work smaller than life-size, he maintains, could not convey the majesty and power of these birds. The reproductions in this book, four of which are double-page spreads, are of necessity much smaller, but they still convey the essential characters of these magnificent birds — their strength, noble appearance and bright, keen eyes. The pictures of feathers, skulls and eggs, however, suffer from being shrunk in size because they look too small to belong to such large birds.

Most of the paintings and drawings are grouped into four sections. **Eagles** includes portraits of six of the world's 35 eagles: Verreaux's Eagle (a very close relative of the Wedge-tailed Eagle), Eastern Imperial Eagle, Golden Eagle, Wedge-tailed Eagle, Little Eagle and White-bellied (no longer 'White-breasted' as stated) Sea-Eagle. The latter three species live in Australia. **Wedge-tailed Eagle** includes many portraits of this species perched, shown from a variety of angles. **Eagles in action** depicts these eagles flying, hunting, feeding and being harassed by ravens and Australian Magpies. There is also an aerial view of a bird gliding high over hills and valleys. **'Eaglet to eagle'** features pairs of birds, nest-building, and the development of a chick from hatchling to adult.

Raptor expert Penny Olsen has carefully selected the accompanying text from observations recorded in 15 books, mostly by well-known ornithologists such as John Gould, David Fleay,

Alfred J North, Graham Pizzey, Peter Slater, and Penny's own book *Wedge-tailed Eagle*. She has also added some explanatory passages. The informative text covers many aspects of the eagle's physiology and life cycle, including eyesight, feathers, flight, hunting, prey and reproduction.

By the end of the book, you feel that you are getting to know these awesome birds and the challenges they face in order to survive. This book will appeal to raptor enthusiasts and anyone interested in wildlife art, but everyone should at least have a look at it.

Virgil Hubregtse

6 Saniky Street
Notting Hill, Victoria 3168

